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MARYLAND GAZETTE

CSX considers Jessup for \$150M rail yard

Area residents concerned about impact of train-truck transfer site

By Ben Weathers

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CSX and state transportation officials are planning a \$150 million railroad yard just south of Baltimore where tons of cargo would shift from trains to trucks and the regional highway network.

But the plan to accommodate a growing number of “double-stacked” railroad cars and avoid bottlenecks in Baltimore by 2015 has raised concerns about a big jump in truck traffic from county residents near two of four sites under consideration.

“Both of these sites would increase traffic immensely,” said Rusty Bristow, vice president of the Jessup Improvement Association. “There are no major roads near where these sites are.”

Bristow plans to voice his concerns to CSX and Maryland Department Transportation officials Thursday at a public workshop on the proposed project in Hanover.

Under an agreement between the state and CSX, the Department of Transportation will seek half of the cost of the project from the federal government, according to Jack Cahalan, spokesman for the state agency. He said it would have a huge impact on the state economy.

“If you can’t move cargo, you’re less likely to become the home of a distribution center,” Cahalan said. “It really is an economic development issue and a job creation issue.”

The need for a transfer facility has become more apparent in recent years as railroad freight carriers increasingly have turned to double-stacking cargo containers. The containers are carried one on top of another to increase the amount of cargo a single train can carry.

While double-stacking allows for faster delivery and lower costs, the taller trains can’t pass under many of the nation’s tunnels and bridges.

CSX and the U.S. Department of Transportation have entered into a \$842 million public-private partnership to increase the height of many of those bridges and tunnels. But the cost of raising the Howard Street Tunnel in Baltimore would be in the billions, Cahalan said.

CSX has opted instead to build “intermodal” facilities in six states to connect its rail lines to the nation’s highways.

The proposed facility would replace the company’s existing site at the Seagirt Marine Terminal in Baltimore.

Two of the sites are on opposite sides of the Anne Arundel County line in Jessup. One is located between Brock Bridge Road and Route 175 — the other is north of Montevideo Road in Howard County. The two other sites are located north of Hanover Road in Howard County and between Sunnyside Avenue and Powder Mill Road in Prince George's County.

CSX had a number of criteria for the final location.

It must be south of the Howard Street Tunnel and link CSX's main rail line with major highways, CSX spokesman Robert Sullivan wrote in an email.

The site must also be at least 70 acres and rectangular in shape, Cahalan said.

And to win federal funding, the project would be subject to a study of traffic impact and other considerations.

The railroad and the state are holding a series of public workshops around the region this spring, with the impact study beginning in the summer, Sullivan said.

Cahalan said anyone who attends Thursday's meeting will not only have an opportunity to ask questions about the project but also to provide feedback.

While news of CSX's plans is just starting to reach the public, Bristow said he expects Thursday's meeting to be crowded.

"Many other people in the community are against this," he said.

- The workshop will be held from 7 to 9 p.m. Thursday at Hebron-Harman Elementary School, 7600 Ridge Chapel Road in Hanover. For information on the project, visit www.mdot.maryland.gov/Planning/ICTF/Home.html.